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Establishing A Campus Early Childhood Center: The First Year

A Paper Presented at the

National Coalition of Campus Child Care

Annual Conference

New Orleans, Louisiana

March 20, 1987

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ABSTRACT

Organizing and establishing a child care center at a college or university presents special difficulties and challenges. Such a center was recently established at the University of South Alabama in Mobile. Initial funding was obtained through a special needs grant from Title 3 of the U.S. Department of Education for strengthening programs at universities and colleges. The Child Development Center in Mobile serves Children of University students, faculty, staff and alumi, and provides a resource facility of training of university students as well as a research site for university faculty studying child development concerns.

Introduction

Before the creation of the Child Development Center, a serious and severely limiting problem existed at the University of South Alabama in that there were no on-campus facilities in the Department of Elementary-Early Childhood Education for clinical observation and training of students in pre-school experiences. Students had to be sent to commercial centers for their field experiences at the preschool level. This was a detriment to students served in the early childhood program as well as to the children of the University population whose needs were not recognized. Analysis of enrollments and follow-up of students in the Department of Early Childhood Education indicated a number of transfers to programs in other colleges and universities in other cities having early childhood education centers.

Federal funds were requested and obtained through Title III of the Department of Education to provide the initial equipment necessary to open an early childhood education center, to hire a director, to develop a curriculum to meet the unique needs of children and students from South Alabama, and to design and implement a rigorous and thorough on-going evaluation system. The Child Development Center (CDC) created with these funds and with the cooperation of the University of South Alabama provides a professional child care facility with a modern, responsive educational program. This facility is used for testing and

research as well, since research and testing form the nucleus of any evaluation and improvement plan for any curriculum.

Priority for placement is given to children within the University community with special attention to children of minority, underprepared, and working single-heads of households. The fee structure is kept competitive with that of other child care facilities in the area. This ensures that the fees will not preclude enrollment of children of low-income parents on the one hand, and yet be adequate to guarantee self-sufficiency after four years of operation.

A Conceptual Focus

The planning for the Child Development Center was long and inclusive. Faculty from the Early Childhood Teacher Education Program met together with other education faculty and selected faculty from other colleges with expertise in child development, psychology, minority affairs, finance, food services, and evaluation design. Opinions of community leaders in local day care were solicited and incorporated in the planning.

Initially, meetings were unstructured and often involved friction as "pet ideas" were sacrificed. Gradually, agreement was reached as the reality of "real world" finances and limitations became clear. Overtime, the decision formed a conceptual structure for a center reflecting needs of the University Community. The key elements in that conceptualization are these:

1. The curriculum is chronological-developmental to enhance the strong sense of family shown by young children.
2. Stress is placed upon the affective development of each child's self-concept as a unique and valuable individual.
3. Nutrition is critical and lunches are served that meet the guidelines established by the USDA. The curriculum also addresses the food groups and benefits of proper nutrition.
4. The fee structure is kept equal to but not competitive with the local child care centers. Each year the budget is reviewed by the fiscal officer of the University to ensure its adequacy. Fees do not exceed those charged by other quality child care facilities.
5. The center uses a lead teacher, teaching team concept. The lead teacher is responsible for the conduct of the curriculum under the supervision of the director and coordination of a team of qualified teacher aides.
6. The director has overall coordinating and management responsibility. The operation of the Center for administration of the units and handling all files, parparing copies and general business matter is carried on by the Receptionist/Management Coordinator under the director's supervision.

7. Parents are an integral part of the planning and program direction for the Center. They are included in a Parent Advisory Board, meet regularly with staff and assist in the Center activities.

Although the above structure leaves unattended many minor, yet important, operational issues for the Center, these guidelines provided a framework for operational-programmatic planning as the center and its programs evolved.

Timelines for Development

Following funding, development of the Child Development Center programs is occurring in the following phases:

Phase I (completed)	October, 1985 - September, 1986: Planning for Center; Renovation of Preschool and Office Buildings; Pilot Program for Preschool
Phase II (in progress)	October, 1986 - September, 1987: Implementation of the Preschool Programs for children ages two through four; Planning and Renovation of Facilities for Infant-Toddler Care; Summer School Pilot Program for Infant Toddler Center
Phase III	October, 1987 - September, 1988: Implementation of Infant Care; Planning for Special Needs Children; Planning for

Accreditation by NAEYC; Continued Refinement and Extension for all Programs

Phase IV October, 1988 - September, 1989: Implementation of Special Needs Program; Accreditation of Programs by the National Academy of Early Childhood Programs Completed; Fiscal Self-Sufficiency Achieved

OVERVIEW OF COMPLETED EVENTS

A. Phase I 1985-1986

During 1985-1986 the objectives for the first year were met in the following manner:

1. Dr. Sue Caraway, Director and Dr. Thomas W. Hewitt, Project Coordinator, met with the University Space Committee in January, 1986, and secured space for the facility. An area in Hillsdale Student Housing was designated as the site. Help from the Engineering Department was secured in designing renovations to three houses located within the married students' housing complex of the University. Guidelines from the National Association for Education of Young Children (NAEYC), the Child Welfare League of America, the Department of Human Resources of the State of Alabama and all local and state codes and regulations were considered in designing the physical space needs of the Center. Renovations to the preschool were completed during the Summer, 1986.

2. Necessary equipment to meet minimum standards of accrediting bodies and local and state agencies were secured by the Center Director.

3. Because one state agency does not license another in the State of Alabama, it was unnecessary to obtain licensing. All guidelines were nevertheless followed and approval of our facility was sought by all agencies involved.

4. A needs analysis survey of the student body and the faculty and staff of each department was conducted by the Center Director and the Student Government Association (SGA) during Winter Quarter, 1986. Based on the results of this needs analysis, it was determined that the Child Development Center would easily reach a maximum capacity of forty children during 1986-1987. The needs analysis indicated that children of minority, underprepared, and working single-heads of households would be well represented.

The care of infants for students attending classes was an extremely important concern addressed in this survey. Quality infant care is expensive and difficult to implement, therefore, the decision was made by the Director and the Advisory Board to delay the start of infant care until the third phase of the project, 1987-1988.

5. A Child Development Center Advisory Board consisting of representatives from the Colleges of Medicine, Education, Allied Health, Continuing Education, the Student Government Association (SGA) and the Gulf Coast Day Care Association was established and

initially met in December, 1985. Further meetings were held throughout the start-up year as needed. The advisory board will continue to meet semi-annually following the first year.

Matters of concern specifically relating to maintaining the health of preschool children in the day care setting were addressed by this group. Working policies regarding future meetings to assist with facility design, curriculum planning, and policy development were set. Management system priorities for the Child Development Center were established.

6. The Director of Food Services for the University of South Alabama was contacted during January, 1986, and nutrition schedules and feeding requirements including clean up and transportation of food were discussed. Meals and/or snacks were planned to meet nutritional requirements as recommended by the Child Care Food Program of the U.S. Department of Agriculture in proportion to the amount of time each child is in the program each day.

7. Illustrative brochures describing the Child Development Center were planned by the director and advisory board and made available. Additionally, public relations for the Center was addressed through interviews and articles appearing in the student newspaper and the local papers.

8. Staffing needs were identified and job descriptions written. The position of lead teacher was advertised and filled in May, 1986. When hired, the lead teacher assumed responsibilities for completing curricular materials orders which

were begun by Dr. Caraway. The lead teacher also was responsible for the orientation of instructional aides in preparation for start-up.

The lead teacher is now joined by a graduate teaching assistant from the Department of Early Childhood Education, a full-time teaching assistant, and two aides. Procedures have been established for the hiring of personnel for future programs as needed. Such personnel are paid out of tuition generated by the Child Development Center.

9. Hours of operation were based on the results of the needs analysis survey of the student body (see implementation strategy 4, above).

10. The Director of the Center with help from the faculty of the Department of Elementary-Early Childhood Education designed the curriculum components for the Child Development Center. Various members of the faculty aided in the ordering of curricular materials designed specifically for the Early Childhood Program of learning.

11. Appropriate faculty with the help of the director and lead teacher designed the training program for early childhood students to include practicum experiences in the Center. Other University Departments, especially Nursing, have their student engaged in practicums involving the Center.

12. The Title III Coordinator, developed systems for collection and submission of Title III funds. Expenditures

relating to the operation of the Center are cleared through the coordinator by the center director.

In the Spring of 1986, the Center director met with the finance department of the University to develop a system for collection of fees and dispersement of expenditures relating to the Center but unrelated to Title III in order to assure a sound fiscal foundation for the Center.

13. During the Summer Quarter of 1986, the Center opened a pilot program with ten students.

Phase II, 1986-1987

Operations during the second year are limited to meeting childcare and child development needs of the children of students, staff and faculty of the University. During the first quarter of full operations (Fall, 1986) thirty-nine (39) preschool children were enrolled in the morning, afternoon or full-day programs. Average attendance was thirty during the busiest part of the Unversity day (i.e., 7:30 a.m. - 2:30 p.m.). Over the next two years, the Center will expand programs to accommodate 60+ children. Utilizing CDC space to sponsor additional tutoring programs and providing help to special needs children and/or afterschool care may be offered.

Statistical profiles for each quarter are part of the CDC management and evaluation process. Statistics gathered during Fall Quarter, 1986, show that the Center's largest number of clients are students and further reflect the following:

- Thirty-two of the children (82%) were children of students;
- Five of the children (12.8%) were from minority or international families;
- Seven of the mothers (18%) were single and maintained their households alone;
- 25% of the families who returned income information surveys earned less than $14,304 per year (interpolated figures based on family of four)
- 14% of the remaining families earn less than $20,350 per year (based on family of four)

The Child Development Center meets a need to serve as a model program in preschool education for the Gulf Coast and Greater Mobile area. During Phase II, objectives relating to extending services as a model center (i.e., outreach inservice and parenting training) as well as planning for special needs of infants and toddlers are being reached.

ANTICIPATED EVENTS

Phase III, 1987-1988

As a model program and a public institution, the Child Development Center needs to develop programs and adjust facilities to meet the needs of children with moderate handicaps. During Phase III, 1987-1988, special attention will be given to development of programs and facilities to meet such needs. The Department of Special Education, Nursing, and Medicine of the University of South Alabama will provide expertise in the

planning of modifications to the program or facilities. Guidelines to be used by day care facilities in modifying programs and facilities for inclusion of special needs children will be followed. The Developmental Behavior Clinic sponsored by the College of Medicine will provide multi-disciplinary evaluations for the children referred to them through the CDC.

During renovations to the buildings, attention was given to the inclusion of ramps and doors to facilitate wheelchairs. With minor additional modifications to facilities and playground, and the addition of a teaching assistant, three to five special learners can be accommodated.

Phase IV, 1988-1989

Special care has been taken during the establishment of the Child Development Center to follow the Guide to Accreditation for the National Association for the Education of Young Children. During Phase IV of the project term (1988-1989), accreditation through this agency will be sought.

All aspects of the Center activities, including management, records, curriculum, and program are involved in this process.

During Phase IV, self-sufficiency will be determined by the fiscal soundness of program operations and the rapport that has been established throughout the university community. All programs, including the special needs program should be in place and operating smoothly. Administrative policies and procedures should continue to be maintained efficiently. Community outreach

programs as well as inservice and parental training will become a reality enabling the CDC to further its role as a model child care program.

Figure 1: Operational Objectives for the
University of South Alabama
Child Development Center 1984-1988

Objectives	Performance Evaluation Measure
1984-85 Pre-Funding	
1. A study of exemplary Early Childhood Centers and Early Childhood programs was completed in the Summer of 1985.	Committee recommendations were sent.
2. A review of the literature was conducted and completed.	Recommendations were prepared for the Dean of the College of Education concerning the needs of an Early Childhood Center.
3. A feasibility study to determine needs, limitations, resources, etc. was conducted.	The study committee developed a model for an Early Childhood Center which includes curriculum, resources, personnel, and equipment requirements. The Dean of the College of Education will review and approve the report.
1985-86	
1. Planning for the implementation of an Early Childhood Center will be completed.	Procedures, policies, and milestones for the implementation of the Early Childhood Center will be produced and initated.
2. Necessary equipment and instructional materials will be purchased.	Activity Director will determine and purchase equipment and materials necessary to implement the Early Childhood Center.
3. Business office procedures will be established.	Bookkeeping procedures and business office policies will be established to accommodate Center fee structure. Complete by August 1986.
4. Personnel will be hired to implement the Early Childhood Center in the Fall Quarter.	Personnel positions identified will be filled in order to begin implementation of The Early Childhood Center in the Fall, 1986. Complete by August 1986.
5. Phase I child care facilities will be opened.	A pilot project will include twenty children. Procedures will be evaluated by Title III Coordinator and Coordination Committee. Initiate September, 1986.
6. Development of a training program for Early Childhood Center personnel will commence.	Activity Director and faculty of the Early Childhood Center will determine needs and develop a training program for Center employees. Complete by August, 1986.
7. Inservice training program for Early Childhood Center personnel will be continued.	An inservice training program for Early Childhood Staff will be documented. Initiate August, 1986. Complete by November, 1987.

Objectives	Performance Evaluation Measure
1986-87	
8. Phase II implementation of Early Childhood Center at full capacity will be accomplished.	Operational status will be determined by utilization to design capacity, client satisfaction, fiscal self-sufficiency. Complete by January, 1987.
9. Early Childhood program will be evaluated to determine performance and interface with curriculum areas.	University of South Alabama evaluation committee will prepare an evaluation report on the performance of the Early Childhood Center and its interface with areas of school curriculum. Complete by June 1987.
10. University of South Alabama Early Childhood Center curriculum and instructional plan will be monitored for scope, sequence and validation.	Center program will be sequenced and reviewed for scope-sequence-balance of curriculum. Complete in June, 1987.
1987-88	
11. Program will be carefully evaluated and revised.	Center instructional patterns will be monitored for fit with curricular objectives. Complete in February, 1988.
12. Objectives will be re-examined and added to or deleted by the committee.	Task-function analysis will be placed on Center management operations plan. Complete January-February, 1988.
13. Staffing and curricular adjustments will be made as needed.	Functions to role analysis will be made to assess staffing needs or adjustments. Complete February-March, 1988.
14. University of South Alabama Early Childhood Center will be self-sufficient.	Fees and tuition will pay total costs of Early Childhood Center. The Dean of the College of Education will conduct a complete evaluation including fiscal procedures, parent and child satisfaction, student learning and faculty and staff approval. Complete by December, 1988.

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